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Application Form - Open Call Paper

Title: Workers Are Doing It for Themselves? Local Labor Solidarity in Precarious Times

Summary: Historically, organized labor has played a fundamental role in guaranteeing basic rights and privileges for screen media workers and defending union and guild members (however unevenly) from egregious abuses of power. Yet, despite the recent turn to labor in media and cultural studies, organized labor today has received only scant attention, even less so in locations outside Hollywood. This presentation thus intervenes in two significant ways: first, it acknowledges the ongoing global ‘undoing’ of organized labor as a consequence of footloose production and conglomeration within the screen industries, and second, it examines a case example of worker solidarity and political praxis taking shape outside formal labor institutions in response to those structural shifts. Accordingly, it links an empirical study of individual agency to broader debates associated with the spatial dynamics of screen media production, including local capacity, regional competition, and precariousness.

Drawing from ethnographic interviews with local film and television workers in Glasgow, Scotland, I consider the political alliance among three nascent labor organizations in the city: one for below-the-line crew, one for facility operators, and (oddly enough) one for producers. Collectively, the groups share a desire to transform Glasgow into a global production hub, following the infrastructure developments in nearby cities like Belfast, Prague, and Budapest. They furthermore frame their objectives in political terms: establishing global scale is considered a necessary maneuver to improve local working conditions like workplace safety, income disparity, skills training, and job access. Ultimately, I argue these groups are a product of an inadequate union structure and outdated policy vision for the screen sector, once-supportive institutions currently out of sync with the global realities of media production. Furthermore, the groups’ advocacy efforts reveal the extent to which workers themselves (in addition to capital) can seek “spatial fixes” to suture their prospects to specific political and economic goals. Of course, such activities manifest under conditions outside of the workers’ control but nevertheless point to an important tension within capitalist social relations, namely that the agency to reshape the spatial relationships in their own lives recasts the geography of labor in terms that aren’t inherent or exclusive to the interests of global capital.

Category: Technology and Industry Studies

Keywords global production, organized labor, space and place

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Author Bio: Dr Kevin Sanson is a Lecturer in Entertainment Industries at Queensland University of Technology. Previously, he was the Research Director of the Carsey-Wolf Center’s Media Industries Project at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He also is a founding member of the editorial collective for the journal *Media Industries*. His current research examines the spatial dynamics of screen media production, focusing on production cultures and working conditions in global production hubs.

Co-Author:

Co-Author Bio:

If your paper is selected for an open call panel, would you be willing to chair the panel?

Yes